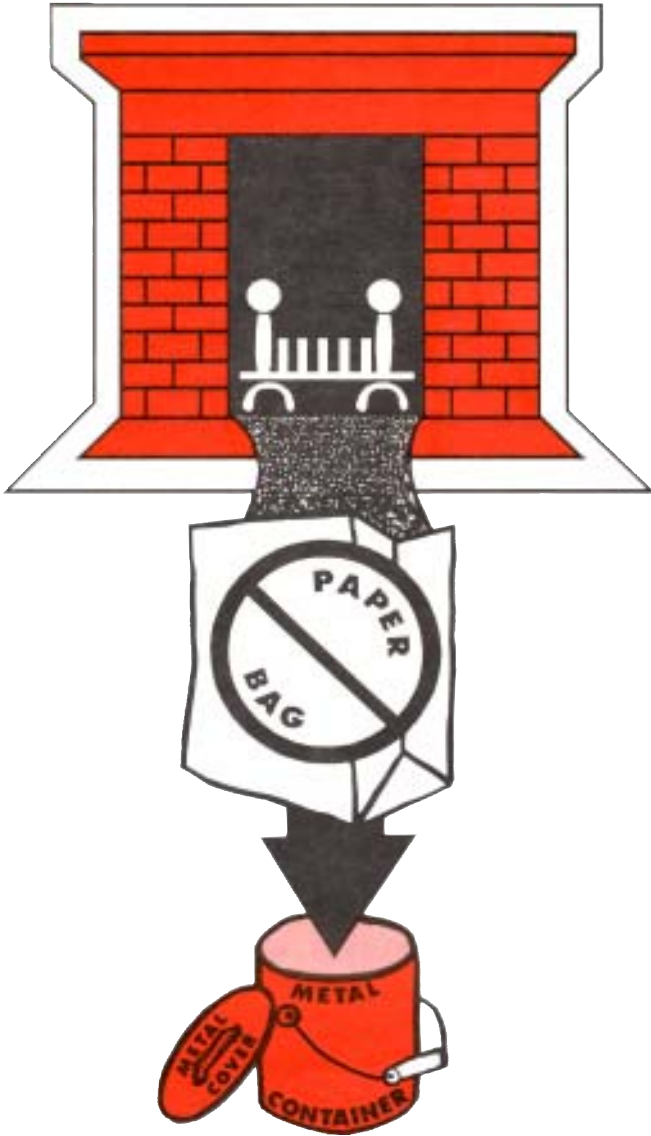


WARNING!

Do not use a bag to dispose of ashes.



Can Your Ashes



Can Your Ashes

The Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department is proud to sponsor a public service program concerning fireplace ash disposal. The program is entitled "Ashes to Ashes; Houses All Burn Down" and is geared toward educating homeowners of the inherent danger of disposing of fireplace ashes in an improper container or location. We bring you this simple message: "Can Your Ashes."

Statistical Background

Most people do not view the improper disposal of fireplace ashes as a serious home safety threat, but statistics prove otherwise. The National Fire Protection Association recently released statistical data taken from the years 1994 – 1998, concerning fires started by a hot ember or ash that was abandoned or discarded. According to this survey, we can expect the following to occur each year:

9,870	structure fires
32	civilian deaths
171	civilian injuries
\$1,16.5	property damage (in millions)

As the numbers bear out, the problem is extensive, but let's bring it closer to home. Using data taken from the recent study conducted in Fairfax County the year 2001, we have learned that:

1. The number of fires and the amount of property damage caused by these fires remains a major concern. During the period from January 1, 2001 to December 31, 2001, we had a

property loss of \$561,976. Many of these fires occurred during normal sleeping hours. Fortunately, there were no deaths.

2. Many people do not realize the length of time required for ashes to cool. Fires that involved ashes that reportedly had cooled for up to 24 hours accounted for 62% of the incidents. Fires that involved ashes cooled for up to 72 hours accounted for 8%. Coals or embers can remain hot for a long time, four days (96 hours) is the minimum cooling period for ashes.

3. Homeowners often use inappropriate containers to dispose of ashes.

- 4% of homeowners used a **paper** bag as the initial container for their ash;
- 17% of homeowners used a **plastic** trash can as the initial container for their ashes;
- 8% of homeowners used a **cardboard** box as the initial container for their ashes; and

So, how do you properly clean your fireplace or wood stove and dispose of the dangerous ashes safely?

Proper Fireplace Cleaning Methods

When you clean your fireplace, there are a few things to keep in mind.

1. You should always place discarded fireplace ashes in a heavy metal container, moisten the ashes and cover the container with a metal lid. **NEVER USE A PAPER BAG**, a cardboard box or a plastic trash bag in the cleaning process. Never use a vacuum cleaner to pick up ashes.

2. Ashes should be kept in a metal container outside, away from the house to cool. Your garage, house, or deck are dangerous locations for ashes to cool. After ashes have cooled in a metal container, it is necessary to find a suitable disposal site. **Never dump fireplace ashes until they have had at least four days to cool.** Even after four days, great care should be given in selecting a dump site. Wooded areas should always be avoided.

Proper Disposal of Fireplace Ashes

Garden areas or flower beds are ideal locations to dump cooled fireplace ashes, allowing many nutrients to return to the soil. Please survey the area and evaluate any additional hazards before disposing of your cooled ashes. Make sure all dry leaves have been removed from the area before dumping your ashes in either a garden or flower bed that is away from the house and remember to moisten the area.

What Can You Do to Help?

The most important contribution you as a homeowner can make to our campaign is simply to heed our message of prevention to tell family and friends. Our goal is to eliminate this problem in Fairfax County and the Commonwealth of Virginia. Every fire we prevent brings us closer to success. Just remember our simple slogan: **"Can Your Ashes."**

If you wish to know more about this program or would like to request this document in an alternative format, please call the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department's Public Information and Life Safety Education Section at 703-246-3801, TTY 703-385-4419, or visit our web site at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/fire.